NSGIC '09: Summary and Highlights

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In many ways, the 2009 NSGIC annual conference was a barometer for the impact of new technologies and trends on the geospatial field.

Much of the presentation content, discussion, and twittering focused on social media and mainstream technologies/players that will likely become extremely relevant to 41 state GIS coordinators, government GIS operations, and industry represented in Cleveland this week. Despite the poor wireless internet performance at the conference hotel, a good portion of the attendees followed the presentations and the online Twitter discussion (#NSGIC2009) simultaneously; many did so on accounts they did not have prior to the conference.

This seems to prove the point that in the information technology world -- it would be a hard argument that GIS and geospatial aren't inhabitants -- change is a given and we all need to keep up or face the consequence: irrelevance. Not convinced? Ivan Deloatch, Staff Director of FGDC, announced that FDGC is seriously considering conducting a portion of its efforts to construct a new national geospatial policy document (that will likely form the basis of NSDI 2.0) using online collaboration and social networking tools.

Utah at NSGIC. Utah's participation with NSGIC has always been strong. At this years conference, Dennis Goreham was honored with NSGIC's lifetime achievement award and Bert Granberg was elected to the NSGIC board . Matt Peters and Bert presented on AGRC's efforts to expose the many content layers in Utah's State Geographic Information Database (SGID) as web and map services.

Key conference threads (note, all NSGIC 2009 powerpoint slidesets are available on slideshare.com):
- NSDI. Ivan Deloatch (FGDC) and Bill Burgess, NSGIC's legislative liaison in DC presented their thoughts on the state and future of the NSDI, a to-date elusive vision crafted in the 1980's. Ivan discussed some promising possibilities associated with a web2.0 approach to the NSDI. Burgess, a long time listener, long time caller during the 25 year run of the NSDI talk show presented 13 key NSDI issues that need to addressed if it is to be a successful. Burgess's key issues would be a good study for similar implementation areas within state and local government.

- Data As Services. Utah's geospatial services presentation was just one example of many in support of a simple strategic theme present at the conference: expose relevant data as services, let creative people do great things with them. This approach fits in with the simple mantra "open, transparent" that Deloatch indicated was pervasive in Obama administration.

- Broadband Mapping. NTIA announced the first 4 states awarded funding for mapping broadband availability. With many state GIS coordinators who were involved with their state's application and many private sector partners represented at the conference, it was no accident that NTIA's Anne Neville was on the plenary agenda and very available for discussion during her stay.

- Social/Media New Technologies. Learon Dalby (AR), NSGIC's past president gave a running presentation on social media and new technologies impact to the geospatial field, including a provocative you tube video entitled Is Social Media A Fad?

- Public/Private Partnerships. Consider the emergence of crowd-sourced data (open street map), ubiquitous mobile geospatial collectors (think iphone), and new public/private partnerships like the agreements data partnership that NY and MA have established with NAVTEQ. Just what will be the stewardship model for geospatial data in the future?

Barney Krucoff, the District of Columbia's GIS Manager and National Geospatial Advisory Committee member provided an interesting 2 dimensional continuum for examining the diversity of spatial data sources. The first contiuum characterizes the driver for building the data from public good to mass consumer market. The second dimension characterizes the barrier to entry for creating and maintaining the data from monopoly (high) to relatively no barrier.These two axes divide geospatial data stewardship into four quadrants (see slide 3 from his presentation):

- Public Sector Lead (public good, monopoly). Examples: stream gauge mapping, or topo maps.
- Creative Commons (public good, no barrier). Examples: species sightings, trail mapping
- Public/Private Partnership (mass market, monopoly). Examples: routing data, parcel/valuation data services
- Private Sector (mass market, no barrier). Examples: Starbucks or ATM locations.

Interesting questions arise when looking at these sectors. For example, will new high resolution commercial satellites result in a public/private partnership licensing model or will the current USDA NAIP and USGS urban high resolution model of public domain imagery persist? Will the NY and MA partnership with NAVTEQ become a more persuasive model or will creative commons efforts live Open Street Map become dominant?

- Addressing Standard. Martha McCart Wells, reported on the emerging addressing standard, driven by URISA and NENA, that is likely to be adopted by FGDC . This is a standard that has been in the works for 5 years and provides, in four separate parts, data content, classification, quality, and exchange standards for street, landmark, and postal addresses. It is a data standard (logical) not an database standard (implementation) and attempts to incorporate existing standards work represented in the NENA street and landmark standards and the US Postal addressing standards. The standard includes unique identifiers and, also, standards for quality assessment of addresses and address matching, AGRC now has access to the wiki with latest documentation of this standard and can facilitate access to it (email mwells@spatialfocus.com). The hope is that this standard is finalized in the near future so it can be taken into consideration for the upcoming transportation work group meetings that are part of a FGDC CAP grant that AGRC received.

- The Future of Imagery. With some big players (Microsoft?) rumored to be interested in offering imagery as a service to government and new commercial high resolution satellites going into orbit, many were asking the question "what is the future of public domain imagery programs?" Many states have existing enterprise contracts with Microsoft for software and services, could/will imagery as a service slipped into these existing agreements?

- Sensors and Crowd Sourcing. To be efficient, more data needs to be collected at the point of transaction or by people who know/care enough about the geography to be motivated to contribute. A few looks at OpenStreetMap should be convincing enough.